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INDIAN ELITES IN NATAL,  
SOUTH AFRICA

by

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*CASS/10-KUP*

Paper read at the Social Science Conference

held in

Durban, 16 - 22 July, 1956

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In South Africa a number of distinct systems of value operate within one broad political framework, and the control of power in all spheres - politics, wealth, education, entertainment - is vested in the Europeans. Generally speaking the Non-Europeans, Africans, Indians and Coloureds, aspire to full participation with Europeans but their adaptation to exclusion, and their techniques for attaining their goal, vary with the nature of their own elites and value systems.

This paper deals exclusively with Indian elites in relation both to the Indian community and to the outgroups. Indians constitute roughly 3% of the total population of the Union of South Africa, of the remainder roughly 21% are Europeans, 68% Africans and 8% Coloureds. Through historical and political factors 82% of the total Indian population are concentrated in the Province of Natal, where over 16,000 live in Pietermaritzburg, the provincial capital, and nearly 150,000 in the city of Durban. Government regulations rigidly restrict the movement of Indians from one province to another, and the four provinces of the Union have somewhat different Indian policies. The strictest exclusion of Indians exists in the Orange Free State where the total Indian population numbers 13 (thirteen) persons.<sup>1</sup>

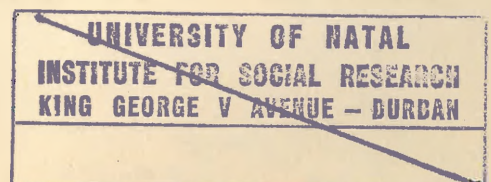
The following analysis of the Indian elites is based on research carried out in Natal, and more especially in Durban, and the findings need to be tested by further research in other provinces and towns.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN IMMIGRANTS

Indian immigrants to South Africa represented two distinct socio-economic groups - labourers and traders. The first shipload of labourers came in 1860 under indenture to the sugar planters for a period of 3 years (later extended to 5 years) and at the completion of their service they could either remain in Natal as 'free' citizens, or receive a free passage back to India. The majority remained. The traders followed in the wake of the indentured under the ordinary immigration laws of the colony and formed the 'passenger' group.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the indentured labourers were Hindus who spoke Tamil, Telegu or Hindustani and expressed cultural associations distinct from the Gujarati-speaking and predominantly Muslim passenger group. The passengers who had special privileges in law, and some of whom achieved the influence of wealth, considered themselves the first elite. Generally, passenger Indians came from a higher standard of living in India than did the indentured; they wore better apparel, enjoyed a higher degree of vernacular education, and ate better food. They were disdainful of the labourer who was losing his cultural affiliations and for whom formalised ritualistic

\* Paper written in conjunction with Fatima Meer.  
1) Figures from 1951 Census.





marriage within his own caste structure had become almost impossible. The passenger Indians kept up their links with their ancestral home by constant communication in writing and in person and preserved their exclusiveness by the importation of wives from their own villages and castes.

The Hindus who migrated under indenture, were drawn from an indefinite number of castes and from each of the four classes (Varna). Their caste-class distribution was influenced partly by the nature of the work for which they were recruited, (the emphasis being on manual labour) and partly by other local and personal factors.<sup>2</sup> But caste could not be transported as a functional system by the heterogeneous cross-section of the Indian population that migrated to South Africa. The social taboos and exclusiveness implicit in the caste structure were violated by the conditions of work on the estates, and of living in barracks, and by the disproportion of men to women (roughly 100 men were recruited to 40 women with no consideration for caste). Caste is a pre-industrial social system, whose elites were encircled by village boundaries and supported by a peasant economy; it inevitably declined when the boundaries were globally shifted by migration and when home industries were replaced by the technological developments of modern industry.

While caste distinctions tended to break down, language and the cultural differences between the Tamil, Telegu and Hindustani sections of the indentured persisted to a greater extent. Tamil and Telegu were originally from South India, and Hindustani were invaders from North India, and despite the closeness of physical living of all indentured groups in South Africa, they kept their distinctiveness to a surprisingly high degree.

Within the passenger group, religion formed the main basis of division. The Gujarati language remained common to most Hindu and Muslim 'passenger' Indians with slight but significant differences in local dialect.

About 90% of South African Indians are second, third and fourth generation born South Africans, and it is almost entirely from this group that the present elites emerged in politics, business, education and entertainment. 'The Elite' is a sum total of those people pre-eminent in these aspects of South African Indian life.

## II. THE POLITICAL ELITES

Colonialism had stripped the Indians of their traditional leadership. Negotiations regulating immigration had been between the British Government in India and the White Government in Natal, and had ignored the village panchayat (Council) and the feudal prince. In South Africa a new political leadership had to develop. In the early years, the passenger immigrants were treated as European colonists and granted full voting rights and these rights were extended to the indentured when freed from service.

The first political elite arose from the trader class. The indentured Indian was desired as a labourer and fitted into the status pattern ascribed to Non-Europeans - that of menial and inferior with limited opportunity for personal development. The passenger trader on the other hand challenged white superiority, and was the first to be affected by anti-Indian legislation. As a re-

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2) From lists retained at the office of the Protector of Indian Immigrants we calculated on a sample of eight boatloads (3,200 people) that approximately 2% were Brahmins (priests), 9% Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), 21% Vaish (merchants), 31% Sudras (labourers), 27% outcastes, 3% were Christians, 4% Muslims and 3% we were unable to classify.



sult, merchants, mainly Muslims took the lead in organising Indian defence, and employed European barristers to draft petitions on their behalf. Indians, still under indenture, or newly 'freed' considered themselves unaffected and were deliberately excluded from participating in the petitions by the traders who felt no gain from associating with them.

The division of economic interest groups in early Indian politics was narrowed under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi who formalised Indian political action through the South African Indian Congress, which he founded in 1894 and of which he became Secretary. Though for several years Congress continued to draw its personnel solely from the trader class, and directed its actions against measures affecting their interests alone, Congress also organised educational youth clubs for the children of indentured Indians, and finally with the support of the traders and the indentured, fought to improve the general conditions of all Indians. This change in attitude is clearly illustrated by the difference in objective between the first and second Passive Resistance Campaign. The first was directed against restrictive and humiliating immigration laws introduced in the Transvaal and affecting the rights of traders in and to that province. The resistance was organised as a result of a resolution taken at a mass meeting, and the trader became the resister.

The Second Resistance Campaign was directed against wider issues directly related to the indentured, firstly the Poll Tax imposed on free Indians who failed to re-indenture or to deport themselves back to India and, secondly the marriage laws which, according to a court judgment, made Indian marriages contracted in accordance with Indian tradition illegal. Passenger and indentured participated in protest, and women from both groups joined in and inspired the resisters. The Second Passive Resistance Campaign (1913) thus emancipated Indian politics from the personal interests of the traders and paved the way for the raising of a political elite drawn from all sections of South African Indians. Resistance was a last resort; more usual were negotiations and deputations on both a personal and governmental level (e.g. the Smuts Gandhi Agreement; the Paddison Deputation; the Beyer Deputation; and the Habibulla Deputation (1926) from India that culminated in the Cape Town Agreement of 1927).

In spite of Congress efforts, the position of Indians in South Africa steadily deteriorated: they had lost Parliamentary franchise in 1896; in 1922 they lost provincial franchise; their rights to trade and to property were restricted, and attempts to 'repatriate' them were intensified. The Cape Town Agreement which South African Indian leaders had gladly accepted in 1927 was soon seen to be an indirect attempt to encourage repatriation, and not a genuine effort to provide for the 'uplift' by education and social assistance of the considerable number who remained in the country. When Indians wished to adopt a higher and Westernised standard of living and began to move out of the Indian areas to the more attractive and better serviced European suburbs, opposition was raised against 'Indian penetration', culminating in 1943 in the "Pegging" Act, restricting Indians from acquiring land and property.

The Indian political elite were divided on how to deal with anti-Indian legislation, and the divergent groups which had been brought together through the personal influence of Gandhi, drifted into separate and conflicting political camps. The major split took place in 1945 when the old leadership of Congress was challenged and overthrown. The conservative merchant group being replaced by a more representative and more radical leadership. The political clique that had been ousted from power resurrected itself as the Indian Organisation.

Between the Organisation and Congress as they exist in 1956, significant differences continue in their political structure and policies. The Organisation believes in 'compromise and Congress in 'protest'. Both are led by members of the elites, but Organisation leaders are a small closed group, drawn



predominantly from wealthy merchants of passenger origin and Congress leaders are a more democratic group, drawn largely from intellectuals - professional men and trade unionists - of both passenger and indentured origin. The composition of the present Executive Committee of the Natal Indian Congress gives a picture of the various sections constituting South African Indian society: sixteen are from indentured stock; nine from passenger; sixteen are Hindus, eight are Muslims and one is Christian; of the Hindu, twelve speak Tamil or Telegu, three Hindustani, and one Gujarati; of the Muslims one is Urdu speaking, seven Gujarati; the Christian member of the Executive is English speaking. Occupationally five are lawyers and four are doctors; five are in business; ten are working class and one is retired. The supporters of the Organisation are mainly small business men and landholders, but their allegiance is not fixed and definite, and on many occasions they have given moral and financial help to Congress. The smaller Hindu traders in particular are a-political, and turn more readily to religious and welfare organisations. The Congress claims mass support, and had in 1945, at the height of its strength, a paid up membership of 35,000.

The compromise elites of the Organisation are opposed to the protest techniques used by Congress. The Organisation in the words of the Natal President regards itself as 'the watch dog of Indian interests', and is prepared to defend Indian rights by negotiation, discussion, and meetings with the relevant authorities. Its demands are economic rather than directly political and trade opportunities are stressed more than the vote, opportunities for business extension more than freedom of movement. A professional European journalist and 'top' European lawyers are employed to prepare memoranda and petitions for the leaders, and if necessary to argue their case before the powers that be. Organisation leaders are prepared to 'play down' their own system of values if they think their aim can be better achieved by expressing themselves in terms of values approved by the dominant (i.e. White) elite. Having wealth to preserve, they are afraid to fight for further advantages less they lose what they so precariously possess.

Congress, quoting from one of its leaders, 'is prepared to oppose all racialist attacks and will not compromise principles for expediency'. It expresses non-co-operation and non participation by Non-Europeans "in the machinery of their own oppression". As if in dramatic protest against the conciliatory policy of the pre-1945 leadership, the new elite, almost immediately on coming into power, launched (in 1946) the Third Passive Resistance Campaign against the Asiatic Land Tenure Act (the "Ghetto Act"). Congress leaders depend on mass support and maintain contact with the people through open meetings, in public squares, usually after hours or on holidays. Branch organisations are developed, and send representatives to conferences arranged by a central working committee. The President of Congress is carefully chosen and 'built up' by deliberate publicity: he is the mouthpiece of Congress, not the initiator of policy. Leadership involves acceptance of group values, not opportunities for individual ambition. When Congress takes up legal issues, it employs its own Indian legal elite assisted by European barristers well known for their 'left' political affiliations.

In accordance with its conciliatory policy and undirected by any clearly defined political philosophy, the Organisation limits its public activities to the Indian people, and does not consider it wise, or even right, to identify itself with other Non-European organisations in any political issue. It is, however, anxious to win the friendship of Africans, more especially since 1949 when African frustration expressed itself in violence and looting of Indian property. The Organisation fears a recurrence of violence and that potential African nationalism may be directed against them as a wealthy and vulnerable minority, and they believe that these dangers can be lessened by raising the Africans' social and educational level. To this end the Organisation has encouraged its members to endow various schools and institutions and to give bursaries to Africans. In other words, it functions as a selfconscious minority,



jealous of its own distinctiveness, and afraid to lose its few hard preserved rights. Congress on the other hand identifies its interests with those of the African, and sees its role as a participant in a national liberatory movement against racial domination. Its first leaders (in 1945) emerged directly from a non-racial anti-segregation council that applied the principles of non-discrimination to all 'oppressed people in South Africa'. In the Fourth Resistance Campaign (the 'Defiance Campaign against Unjust Laws' - 1952) each batch of resisters included Africans and Indians and was led by one of the elite of either group.

The fundamental difference between the two Indian political elites is logically extended to international politics. The Organisation is essentially cautious, and in conformity with the South African Government's own views states that Non-European affairs are a domestic matter. Congress on the other hand, sees its own struggle for national liberatory movements throughout the world, and is ready to support cultural, social or political issues which may be represented by international non-racial bodies.

The relationship of the Congress and the Organisation with the present South African Government indicates the Nationalists' response to the two different types of elite leadership - protest leadership and compromise leadership. Aware of the influence of the former protest leadership on the Indian people and the Non-European people generally, the Government has banned many of the Congress leaders and declared them promoters of communism under the Suppression of Communism Act, irrespective of their communist affiliations. It is however apparently prepared to negotiate with the Organisation and members of the Government have recently met its representatives.

A few, but potentially influential, members of the political elite have joined the Liberal Party and the Non-European Unity Movement. The Liberal Party, which is a recognized Parliamentary Party, accepts Non-European members, but, acting as it does within the constitutional framework of the country, it is suspect by certain radical Non-European elite. The Non-European Unity Movement with its main strength in the Cape, has a small following among the Indian elite in Natal. It has a protest leadership advocating an ultimate struggle of the Non-European people for the realisation of their basic political rights, and it is critical of any intermediary action directed against individual legislation. Its chief activity lies in the organisation of discussion groups and study circles which may lead to the production of a new intellectual Non-European leadership.

The political outlook of the various elites is reflected in their social life. Among the Organisation in-group exclusiveness becomes intensified, and members participate almost solely in social and religious organisations of a sectional character, often serving on these in the capacity of officials and/or patrons. Organisation leaders on the other hand avoid such associations and express overt disapproval of organisations which may cause communal divisions. The Liberal Party operates on an inter-racial level and its members make deliberate attempts to hold mixed gatherings. The Non-European Unity Movement excludes association with Europeans and Non-Europeans who belong to political bodies other than their own.

### III. THE BUSINESS ELITE

The interaction of economics and politics developed the two distinctive political elites analysed in the previous section. But wealth itself creates an elite operating in other than political fields.

The Natal Indians are a poor community with a per capita income less than one sixth of Europeans, and with the highest dependency rate of any other racial group in the country both because of the high proportion of people too



young to earn and because of the restricted number of women in employment.<sup>3</sup>

In 1951 less than 150 Indians in Durban were recorded liable for supertax, payable on incomes over £1,775; while the total number of Indians paying Income Tax was under 1,500.<sup>4</sup>

The division into indentured labouring and passenger trading groups underlies the distribution of poor and wealthy Indian families, but class divisions associated with Western industrialism cut across the original straightforward economic dichotomy. The indentured labourers who came as poor men and women, severed their ties with village India and were dependent on earnings in Natal. After they had served their term in sugar fields, coal mines or railways, they sought employment offering higher wages. Some became market gardeners, others followed in the footsteps of the passengers and turned to hawking and trading. The majority however remained as labourers in agriculture until Western industry created new openings and, over the past forty years, there has been a steady drift of Indians as labourers and industrial workers to the towns.

The dynamic aspect of Indian economy has been the emergence from the ex-indentured of a core of wealthy elite in business and in professions. Whereas until about thirty years ago all the wealthiest business men were Gujarati-speaking passenger Indians, it is estimated that today about 25% are from indentured Hindu stock.

The passengers, though they retained contact with their kin in India were not all wealthy. A few started branches of business already established in Bombay or Mauritius, but the majority had little or no capital. There was however a sense of solidarity between them and the better off helped their 'own town' boys into trade. Not all prospered, and parallel with the upward mobility from the indentured group was a slipping down the economic scale by a few passengers.

In Indian tradition, large landholders formed a distinct elite and ownership of land still carries prestige. In Natal, from information provided by leading Indian business men, roughly 100 Indians are considered wealthy landowners.<sup>5</sup> There tends to be a sectional pattern in the distribution of landowning - associated partly with a desire 'to live with one's own kind of folk' and partly with the distribution of indentured in the early period. Thus Hindustani predominate in certain areas on the North Coast, Tamils on the South and there are several clearly defined pockets of Telegu. Originally the passengers invested only in trading sites, but gradually the wealthier, particularly among the Muslims, bought land for farming. Expansion of business and branches was restricted by licence difficulties and provincial barriers, and land, till 1946, was one avenue for investment. Of the present large landowners roughly half are indentured and half are of passenger origin. No Indian

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3) In 1951, the per capita income of Indians in Durban was approximately £39 per annum, and of Europeans approximately £274 per annum. Of the total population of 146,183 people, 113,629 (77.3%) were in receipt of no income at all. Figures from Ecological Survey by Department of Sociology, University of Natal.

4) Indian Community of Natal, C.A. Woods, page. 32.

5) Since 1946 legislation prohibits Indians from purchasing land outside restricted areas.



landowner has wealth comparable to that of the Natal sugar 'barons'. One Indian formerly fell into that category, owning both a large estate and the only Indian owned mill, but on his death his estate was divided among a large number of sons and nephews.

While the majority of the Indian traders are in small retail business, the few wealthy businessmen are mainly wholesalers and factory owners. In Durban there are about 25 large wholesale merchants, and about 20 flourishing 'industrialists', of whom five run clothing factories, four furniture factories, two printing presses and the remainder have factories producing various food-stuffs, some specifically related to Indian diet. The wealthy invest their money mainly in urban property in South Africa, and a few have investments in India or Pakistan. In relation to the European, Indian holdings are low: in the valuable central area of Durban, Indian owned property was valued at thirteen million pounds in 1951 and European owned at eighty-four million pounds.<sup>6</sup> Indians have no controlling interests in any of the mines, or heavy industries, and there are no individual millionaires in the Natal Indian community.

Indian business men are not organised: they have no representation on the local Chamber of Industries or of Commerce, and attempts to be admitted have met with rebuff. No Indian is on the Licencing Board or Transportation Board. The survival of the Indian propertied class is finally threatened by the powers conferred on the Government under the Group Areas Act. It is obvious that, in economic power, the Indians, including the elite, are relatively light-weight and are dependent on the Government and the province for the preservation of what they have and the goals to which they can aspire.

It is, and has always been, against the successful Indian merchant that the strongest anti-Indian prejudice is usually directed, though in actual trade relations with Europeans they receive courteous treatment commensurate with their custom. There are no easy opportunities for equal status contact between Europeans and Indian merchants in social life, and to overcome some of the prejudice deliberate attempts are made by Indian merchants to entertain European personalities at formal banquets. This is one of the main functions of the well known Orient Club, but the wives and daughters of the hosts remain at home, and the diplomatically prepared meal, at the end of which the honoured guest is called on to make a speech, lacks the spice of intimacy and the invitation is seldom, if ever, reciprocated.

Indians employ mainly Indians, and since nearly all the Indian businesses are still family concerns, businesses encircle a large core of relatives. Larger firms sometimes employ Europeans as bookkeepers and accountants, and one large fashionable soft goods shop, with connections in Bombay, employs European and Coloured saleswomen. Indians are employed by Europeans in semi-skilled and skilled occupations, but there is a tendency to replace them by Africans or Coloureds after any dispute occurs between Non-European labour and European management. The employment of Europeans by Indians gives a merchant definite prestige; the non-employment of Indians by Europeans accords with the accepted values of White Natalians.

The main clientele of the Indian retail merchants are Non-Europeans and it is safe to say that the Indian business elite has developed largely through capturing the African market. Indian traders have shown a quick appreciation of African needs and desires, and many of them have stocked their shops

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6) Figures by Technical Sub-Committee of Durban City Council.



accordingly; their prices are often lower than those of the European; they frequently assist their customers with credit; many of them have acquired a fluency in the African language (they sometimes also employ African assistants), and the African responds to the oriental convention of bargaining.

Despite this economic interdependence of African and Indian, the merchant group, including the elite, retains towards the African a narrow in-group exclusiveness which is only gradually breaking down. They frequently describe Africans as 'simple', 'uneducated' and 'without any real culture of their own'. At the same time (as we showed in our analysis of the political elite), they are anxious to win African friendship and are prepared to give financial assistance to raise African educational and social standards. Socially there has been some modification of their former separatist approach, so that prominent Africans are occasionally invited to special functions and sit on the platform with leading Indian merchants.

The status of elite is accorded the wealthy Indians by the prestige they have in their own community. Wealth is the main measure of success, and occupations are rated by their economic return. Occupational snobbery is relatively new among South African Indians and hawking, pawnbroking, dealing in second-hand goods and money lending, are not looked down upon as long as they bring in adequate incomes. Merchants and professional men are given precedence in most situations by the semi-skilled and skilled workers largely because of their higher income or salary scale.

Wealth, the most tangible sign of achievement and security is a community that feels and is insecure, is not necessarily conspicuously displayed in possessions or standard of living. Austerity is part of Indian tradition and is still adhered to by some of the most wealthy of the older less Westernised generation; among the younger men there is a tendency to consume wealth more conspicuously, clothing and motorcars being among the important items of display. The luxuries of an elaborate home even when desired are difficult to achieve in a country where there is racially restrictive ownership or occupation of homes in the more fashionable suburbs, and where substantial houses are almost impossible to obtain in the overcrowded 'Indian Areas'. Moreover the joint-family system places heavy responsibility on successful individuals.

The wealthy specialise in their own community in the roles of patrons and philanthropists. State aid for Indians is restricted and inadequate, and the need for assistance is great. The allocation of charity is to some extent circumscribed by sectional interests, Muslims in particular looking after their own first, partly because alms giving and self imposed taxation are enshrined in Muslim law. Institutions endowed by Hindus are usually more inclusive, perhaps because of the more heterogeneous composition of the Hindu population. The reputation of wealth is thus established largely by donations which are usually widely published in Indian papers, in the market place and at social gatherings.

The wealthy elite is not a secure, well established class with a tradition of permanence. Very few Indian families have had wealth for more than a generation and some of the families that had wealth have lost it. Wealth still belongs to families, rather than to individuals, and as the family increases in size the per capita wealth does not necessarily expand proportionately. Moreover the sons inherit 'the throne of the father', whether or not they are trained or fitted for it and in many cases they have through wastefulness or incompetence, squandered the hard won fortune. They, together with the rest of their kin, then fall out of the wealthy, and the social, elite.

Marriages among South African Indians are arranged by the parents, and it is recognised, especially among the merchants, that equality of wealth is an important qualification for compatibility. Among the



Muslim marriages are arranged with close kin and among the Gujarati Hindus within caste and village circles. The wives of the wealthy merchants are the elite within their own restricted religious and linguistic boundaries. They seldom appear on public social occasions, but at weddings or religious functions which they may attend, they set the standard of ambition and of fashion by their clothes, jewels, and general deportment.

The seclusion of women of the wealthy merchants influences the type of social life of their menfolk. The Muslims belong to men's clubs, formed roughly on the basis of age and interest. The Gujarati have few non-kin associations, and the men foregather chiefly for religious or social occasions. It is typical of the merchant elite that it has a strong pride in traditional culture, including the mother tongue, and uses English only when necessary for communication. It leads the group that subscribes most strongly to religious and vernacular teaching even in state-aided schools.

#### IV. THE INTELLECTUAL ELITE

The early immigrants came for economic reasons and did not include any outstanding scholars, but in both passenger and indentured groups there were a few individuals able to give limited instruction in the vernacular.

Traditional education was tied to religion and for Hindus and Muslims was evaluated primarily by knowledge of the sacred books. In South Africa the occasional holy man - the saddhu of the Hindu and the pir of the Muslim - received respect and became the centre of a cult, but holy men were not members of an elite in the sense of belonging to any corporate group of peers and possessing qualities that others desired to emulate. Nor did the Hindu Brahmins and Muslim priests constitute a defined religious or intellectual elite in South Africa, for their knowledge was limited to particular ceremonies, and their standing was derived from patronage bestowed on them, rather than by them.

As the Indians became more settled, the different religious and language groups imported vernacular teachers, but the salaries offered were too low and the social environment was too difficult to attract the better qualified and more highly cultured. Some 200 vernacular teachers came to South Africa after 1913 when Indian immigration was virtually prohibited and teaching was the only avenue whereby new men could not only enter the country, but, after nine years in the profession, obtain domiciliary rights. More recently, particularly through developments in India and Pakistan, and increasing self consciousness through present day developments in South Africa, the interest of South African Indians in Indian culture has grown, and a few (less than a dozen) outstanding scholars trained in leading universities and Ashrams have been induced to come out as teachers. They form a recognised religious-intellectual elite within their own sub-groups, and, to a very much lesser extent, within the Indian community as a whole. They depend on the patronage of the wealthy who employ them in private schools where the pay is low and their public activities are restricted by religious boundaries.

The most influential and esteemed of the intellectuals are men and women who have attained a high degree of Western secular education. The Cape Town Agreement of 1927 offered the hope that citizen rights would be accorded Indians who followed Western standards of living. While the Agreement did not provide the means of achieving this, the 'uplift' clause of the Cape Town Agreement marks a stage in Indian development in South Africa - the capitalisation of Western education.

Approximately 2,000 Indians can be classified as professional, and of these more than 1,800 are teachers, over 70 are doctors, 25 are lawyers, 3



are dentist, 1 is a surveyor, and a few are in social work. There are as yet no local facilities for engineers, accountants or architects.

Of the teachers, some 200 are University graduates and less than 20 postgraduates. There is one Indian with a Ph.D. and he holds a research post in the University of Natal.

The composition of the present intellectual elites reflects the historical and social background of the people. The first passenger merchants, both Hindu and Muslim, were the least interested in Western education which was less profitable than business. The later passengers included a few Christians who already spoke English and who came in as teachers. For the poor, education provided the opportunity for upward mobility, so the ex-indentured showed the greatest desire for education (and amongst them the Tamil rank foremost), producing proportionately the greatest number of girls and boys in high school and in the professions, other than medicine.

It is clear that the number of intellectuals is small. The reason lies primarily in the limited educational facilities for Indians and in the limited opportunities for the educated. A study of Indian education reveals a constant struggle by the Indian community to obtain education for their children. Initially children who conformed in dress and habit to Western standards were allowed to attend European private schools, but the State made no provision for the other children a few of whom went to schools started by missionaries. When in 1875 the Natal Government declared that government financed schools be open to all races, this was strongly opposed by White settlers who forced into existence the present system of segregated education.

The number of Indian schools and of pupils in the schools more than doubled in the past 30 years, but despite this increase, the Department estimated in 1952 that some 15,000 children, approximately 20% of all Indian children of school going age, could not gain admission into any school. The great majority of school goers do not go beyond Standard VI and of these only a small percentage reach matriculation standard:-

	<u>1948</u>	<u>1952</u>
Number of scholars in Standard VI	2288	2761
Number of scholars in Standard X	138	302

Those who pass the matriculation standard and are ambitious for further study may attend a Teachers Training College or the University, and the Natal University since 1936 gives a limited number of courses for Non-Europeans.<sup>7</sup>

A very small number who can afford it, study at the two non-segregated universities in the Union or preferably in universities in the British Isles (mainly Edinburgh and Dublin) or in India.

From numerous interviews, and from observations of behaviour and protocol on important public occasions, it is evident that the professions are rated more by their economic potential than by any other single factor.

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7) These courses, started for the B.A., now include Commerce, Social Science, Education, Medicine (since 1951) and Law (since 1956). In 1953 there were 161 Indian students of whom 15 were women.



For this reason teaching, which employs most of the educated, is ranked lower than other professions. Teachers have a relatively low earning capacity (it approximates more closely to that of skilled workers in industry) and requires a shorter period of training than other professionals; only principals of high schools and a few senior teachers with university degrees and top salary scales are accepted socially by other intellectual elites.

A somewhat larger number form an elite within the teaching profession itself and serve on Teachers' societies. The teacher holding only a Junior Certificate still finds employment, but matriculation is recognised by most of the younger generation as the first rung on the intellectual ladder.

The majority of teachers are drawn from the ex-indentured group, and it is only since 1943, when teachers in the many Government-aided as well as in the few Government schools were employed on an equal basis by the Provincial Education Department, that children of the merchant class began to enter the teaching profession in any significant numbers.<sup>8</sup>

Virtually every doctor is considered a member of the elite because of his long and expensive professional training, combined with his unlimited - i.e. unspecified - earning capacity. The first doctors, who were from the passenger group and who qualified overseas, soon established large and lucrative practises among the Non-Europeans, and there is evidence that the community anticipates similar rewards for other medical practitioners. As the years went by, a few from the indentured entered the profession. Of 67 doctors practising at present, there are 40 passenger, and 27 of indentured stock.<sup>9</sup> In the passenger group 23 are Muslims, 8 are Hindu, 5 are Christians and 4 are Parsees; except for one Christian, all the ex-indentured group are Hindus of whom 17 are Tamil and Telegu, and 9 are Hindi speaking. All the doctors, bar one, are in general practice, and their work is confined to private patients and beds in private hospitals run specifically for Non-Europeans.

Second to doctors come the lawyers, who were also originally trained overseas, the first Indian to practise in South Africa being Gandhi. Indians anxious to qualify as lawyers had considerable difficulty in being articled until recently, when, with the gradual increase in the number of those qualified, new openings were created.

The rating by the community of the intellectual elite does not depend on service to the community in the social or political fields. Teachers play the most pronounced role in social welfare organisations, and of the 21 best known lawyers, 14 are in active official positions in political parties. From the medical profession on the other hand only 9 or 10 of a total of 70 are associated with political parties and an insignificant number with social welfare and health institutions in a voluntary capacity.

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8) The preponderance of 'ex-indentured' to 'passenger' is still apparent: of 236 students at the Springfield Training Centre, only 13 are definitely of 'passenger' origin (i.e. speak Gujarati as a home language). Of the remainder, 88 gave Tamil as their home language, 55 Hindi, 23 Telegu, 51 English (this includes some Tamilians) and 6 Urdu.

9) Our information on the additional six is uncertain.



That the intellectual elite is a newly emerging group is illustrated by a wide difference in educational standards between them and their parents.<sup>10</sup>

Women professionals came mainly from homes in which one or both parents are educated beyond Standard VI, but this does not apply to the men.

Between the educated child and the uneducated parent there is frequently a conflict of values, but the Indian family system is extraordinarily flexible and tolerant. The entry of one member into the intellectual elite is usually made possible only by the contributions of kinsmen to his education, and they all share the deference subsequently accorded him and he in turn continues to recognise his economic obligations towards them.

Though occupations are rated, the absence of occupational snobbery noted in the previous section may be associated with the relatively recent emergence of a Westernised intellectual approach, and tolerance tends to be less in families that already have a tradition of professional education.

The Western educated elites have adopted many of the values and symbols of White South Africans. Their homes are furnished in Western style, and their social relations are notably free and non-sectional. They hold parties to which they invite other professionals from the Indian community, friendly Europeans with liberal sympathies, and occasionally intellectual Africans. Men and woman eat together from Western utensils, and the women are expected to take part in the general conversation.

The domestic pattern of the intellectual elite tends to differ from the joint family living still adhered to by the wealthy merchant class groups and more conservative families. The young professional generally desires a wife who will bolster his modern ways and is reluctant to marry a woman whose mode of life has been restricted by traditional orthodox upbringing. Wealthier parents, fearing this tendency, sometimes marry off their sons before they have qualified and can support a wife without parental assistance. The professional man finds the traditional technique of wife-hunting embarrassing, but opportunities for meeting Indian girls socially are rare. Thus several young professional men have married against the wishes of their parents, choosing women accessible for pre-marital acquaintanceship, i.e. women from less restricted families in the Indian community or from other ethnic groups (Europeans, Coloured and Malay). The occurrence of out-group marriage is rare, but appears to be greatest among the educated sons of Gujerati Muslims, i.e. the group where segregation of the sexes is most rigid.

Most professional men follow the general pattern of bringing their wives to live with their parents for the first period of married life, but this restricts their Western acquired individualism and once they have the means, they try to establish their own homes as soon, and with as little conflict, as possible. Once the Western educated man is on his own, he tends to restrict the size of his family, emphasising the high cost of educating children and the difficulty of rearing a large family without the help of relatives in the same house.

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10) Of the 236 students training as teachers, 105 had passed Standard VIII and 131 were matriculated; in the parent generation only 88 fathers and 27 mothers had passed Standard VI and the remaining 148 fathers and 209 mothers were either completely illiterate or semi-literate.



English very often forms the chief language of communication among the intellectuals though deliberate attempts are made to teach the children the rudiments of a vernacular. Only the Christians, more especially the older generation of educated converts, tend to speak English exclusively in accord with their pattern of complete Westernisation.

Most Indian women are considered extensions of their husbands, but intellectual women are rated by their own achievements. The intellectual women elite are few but include some who are exceptionally able. Their status is a personal achievement sometimes attained in the face of strong family opposition, and until a few years back in face of strong social opposition. Their liberation is to some extent, and at some period, overtly manifested in dress, or occasionally, hairstyle. Western dress is universally permitted for school wear, but for married women to dress in Western fashion or cut hair short, still invites criticism.

Because of purdah and the ascription of a domestic role to Indian women, not many girls attained high school education, but in the past 20 years the restrictive attitudes have changed considerably and the number has increased correspondingly. In 1937 only 47 girls attended secondary schools, in 1954 the number had swelled to 817. For women as well as men to be recognised as members of the intellectual elite requires more nowadays than a secondary education and Western clothing. Between 20 and 30 women have obtained the degrees of B.A. at the local university, one had an M.A. degree, there are 11 doctors and 2 women articulated as lawyers. The intellectual women are the only women who do not lose status by spinsterhood and when they marry they are expected to continue with their careers. Independence and self-confidence, qualities not desired in the average South African Indian women, have won for the educated a certain immunity from social criticism but generally speaking they try to observe social regulations as sincerely as possible, unwilling to have their enlightenment misinterpreted as the flouting of social norms and the slavish imitation of Western ways.

In public affairs, the intellectual women elite are appreciated as valuable ornaments. They serve as patrons of organisations, officiate at openings, act as guest speakers or hold other such prestige giving role. A few have served in the background of political movements and some of the women doctors have worked inconspicuously and free of charge at clinics.

The educated Western elite, having moved farthest from tradition, consciously suffer most through exclusions from European theatres, music and other cultural activities. Informal social relationships with Europeans are rare, except for a few personal friendships across the colour bar between individuals drawn mainly from the professions and from political anti-racialist groups. The few non-political inter-racial organisations to which the Indian elite may belong are not particularly popular, and many of those who attend, say they do so without pleasure, unwilling to be patronised and sensitive to rebuff. At the same time association with Europeans (more especially successful and/or professional men and women) is considered prestige-giving by many Indians in the community. It is thus from the less radical and more conciliatory section of the professional group that office holders of race-relations organisations are drawn. The attitude of the intellectual towards the European is characteristically ambivalent: on the one hand he identifies with European values and on the other hand, as he is rejected by Europeans, he in turn desires to reject them.

#### V. THE SPORT AND ENTERTAINMENT ELITE

Sport and entertainment are part of any developed society, but the promotion of the participants to the status of elite depends on the values underlying the structure of their associations. In South Africa the sport and



entertainment personnel fall into two distinct categories of players and organisers, and while the players as such do not form part of the generally accepted 'upper circles', the organisers qualify for membership at certain levels. Within the 'players' sportsmen are more admired and appreciated than entertainers but in neither field is there a developed 'hero' or 'star' cult. The popularity of a player on the sports ground or on the stage does not elevate him to a position of importance or prestige in community affairs. The power role is assumed by the manager or promotor.

### SPORT

Western sport is supported by all sections of the South African Indian population. In 1890 the indentured formed the first Indian soccer teams and since then clubs have developed for cycling, cricket, boxing, football, tennis, table tennis, swimming and athletics. The provision of a few central sports grounds, and the comparatively cheap price at which games can be enjoyed by large numbers, accelerated the progress of sport among people whose opportunities for entertainment and selfexpression were economically, politically and culturally restricted.

Sports organisers and managers are elected to prominent positions on sporting organisations by virtue of their pre-eminence in some other field of social life such as politics, business or education. The majority of these men no longer play themselves, nor need they have excelled in sport in their youth, but they have had past personal experience, and, as members of the general elite, continue to be actively interested. The outstanding player who receives mass adulation during the game and has his pictures published in the newspapers, provides a measure of aspiration for the young would-be sportsmen, but in so-called 'high society' he need enjoy no special status. Only in boxing, the arena in which South African Non-Europeans have already won international fame, the professional receives more than public acclaim and newspaper publicity, and has a distinctive and high status. Apart from the occasional boxer, all South African Indian sportsmen are part-time and non-professional, and their achievements do not add to their livelihood nor elevate them to the influential role of organisers. During the year, the various sporting bodies arrange banquets and parties and honour is conferred on players by the presence of a few who extol the teams in speeches.

Non-Europeans co-operate more closely in sport than in any other situation. Teams are usually selected separately from Indians, Africans or Coloureds, but play against each other, and sports organisers are appointed to central boards of control for their individual ability and not on a sectional basis. Indian officials, drawn from Indian elite circles, play an impressive part and predominate numerically over other single racial groups. Their position indicates the inter-racial tolerance of the players, and this is also promoted by the publicity given in most Non-European newspapers to sport and sportsmen irrespective of communal affiliations.

The unity of Non-Europeans in sport contains within it a potential force for inducing changes extending beyond the sports fields, a potential which, if realised, will probably effect the composition of the elite. Organisations formed in recent years have not only been inter-racial, but deliberately non-racial. The South African Soccer Federation, the South African Cricket Board of Control, and the South African Table Tennis Association all function as non-racial bodies. European sporting bodies, however, abstain from joining the non-racial federations. The Non-European urge for equal status recognition in South Africa and the world generally finds expression on the sporting front and representations are being made for affiliation to the various international sports organisations. Already the South African Table Tennis Federation, with membership open to all, has been accepted by



the world body which refused affiliation to the European counterpart on the grounds of sectionalism. Should the Non-European members from South Africa go overseas, it is clear that they would be more than 'players', they would be raised emotionally to the status of ambassadors!

The pressure for recognition comes mainly from the players, who belong predominantly to the working class, and is exerted by them on officials drawn largely from the wealthy elite, some of whom in other situations, have conservative political allegiances. Protest, not compromise, is being advocated, and the Non-European cause in the field of sport, as of politics, is championed by such Europeans as Father Huddleston, Canon Collins and Harry Bloom.

Focussing more sharply on the Indians as participants in different sports, a selective process based on economic class distinction is evident. Soccer, football and boxing are mainly played by the working class, cricket and tennis by the elite - the wealthy, the professional and the intellectual. Following the pattern of group exclusiveness in the Indian community which is most pronounced in the merchant class, tennis and cricket clubs exist in which membership is confined to a single religious group.

Indian women are not prohibited from sports but the domestic role of the average housewife excludes her participation. A few Indian women from the intellectual elite play tennis and table tennis, even entering for inter-racial tournaments, while wives and daughters of a few of the merchants play in the seclusion of private courts. Indian schoolgirls from all socio-economic classes are actively interested in athletics, and school sports are a recognised technique of bridging social and racial gulfs, giving an opportunity for display to children from any group.

The Indian newspapers are cognisant of the place of sports in the lives of the Indian public and give sporting news as much space as political news. Obituary notices never fail to register the sporting activities or associates of the deceased, no matter how parochial these may have been.

#### ENTERTAINMENT

The concert artist and professional actor were never part of traditional Indian culture. Talent was highly developed, but the dancer, singer and poet were associated with the court or the temple. In modern India and Pakistan "the state" is the foremost patron, subsidising the arts and raising the status of artists. In South Africa, the Indian entertainer depends on the patronage of the wealthy and/or intellectual in his own community.

In South Africa, Indian entertainment suffers from lack of appreciation and patronage. The European Western-orientated state can hardly be expected to sponsor South African Indian forms of art, expressed in music,

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- 11) At the time of writing this article, the South African Football Association, which represents all Non-European players, stated its case against the South African Football Association, composed of Europeans only, before the International Federation of Football Associations at Lisbon. The decision has been postponed till the next meeting in Stockholm in 1958. The South African Cricket Board of Control is about to make representations for world recognition and South African Non-Europeans are also contemplating seeking admission to the Olympic Games.



dancing and theatricals, and the Indian community regards traditional entertainment as of secondary importance. Those who could afford to patronise it, carry much of the burden for educational and social welfare projects, and many of the Western intellectuals prefer the more modern cinema and Western productions. Stripped of financial support and prestige, Indian talent remains relatively undeveloped and the status of performers is low.

The most popular occasions for traditional entertainment are religious festivals, at which no charge is made, and which draw an audience from the poorer and less sophisticated. Women never take part in these performances, which are badly staged, and the men, who perform for a small remuneration, lack training and often talent.

Non-religious bands with solo performers are in a different category and usually play pseudo-Eastern numbers from films. They are hired for the more sophisticated and wealthier Indian weddings but the players have no other social entrée. Occasionally a girl with a good singing voice or talented in dancing performs with such a band and adds to its market value despite the fact that the 'better class' families do not approve of their own girls exhibiting themselves in this way.

Bands playing modern dance music are the most popular in the Non-European community as a whole, and the best have earned some fame through being recorded, but players whose earnings are small are not regarded as important in the community.

Among Muslim groups, Quwaalis (religious singing) and Mushairas, described as the gathering of poets, are privately organised, and while the standard of performance is often high, poor patronage limits their development. No fees are charged but the artist who succeeds in stirring the emotions of the listeners is rewarded in money which is thrown at his feet as a mark of appreciation.

Plays in English, and concerts on the Western model, receive elite recognition, and Indian women participate in these without evoking adverse criticism. Such productions, however, are invariably staged to raise funds for welfare or educational purposes and never remunerate the performers and producers.

With the revival of the traditional arts in India and Pakistan, local intellectuals are beginning to be drawn to their own cultures and the artist of today expounding 'pure' Indian music or dancing is beginning to be recognised and sought after. Musical societies to foster 'traditional' instruments and improve the standard of performance are being organised by a few men and women who have returned recently to South Africa. Formerly, a child expressing interest in dancing would have been suppressed, today the intellectual parent seeks a suitable dancing teacher.

However, there is as yet no place for the professional Indian artist in South Africa, and it seems that his acceptance into the elite will only come when, through the recognition of his talents, he is able to earn an income commensurate with that of other professionals.

#### CONCLUSION

Indian elites derive their values from South African European culture and from past and present associations with India. The values even when common, are not shared; South African Indian society has a sub-culture of its own. It is less stratified socio-economically than that of the surrounding South African Whites; and since its members are denied admission to many



positions, it operates in a relatively retarded cultural area. Adjustment to this had led to the emergence of two broad types of Indian elites in each field of social life - the protest and the compromise elites - advocating different methods of producing social status changes. The protest elites, led mainly by intellectuals, identify with Non-Europeans and 'oppressed people' in general; the compromise elites operate as a defensive and exclusive minority. The attitude of South African Whites to the Indian elites is conditioned by the two approaches in public life. Those who accept exclusion suffer less from exclusion than those who challenge it.

In South African Indian society itself the elite are rated by criteria of influence, esteem and popularity. The political and wealthy exercise the greatest influence, the professional class receives the highest esteem, and the sportsmen are the most popular. We showed, that the criteria overlaps and that wealth is the most general single constituent element of the various elites.

The original differences between indentured and passenger underly most of the present socio-economic stratification, but these differences are being removed by the upward mobility of the ex-indentured and the downward pressure from the Europeans, and it appears that the Indian elite of the future will relate more to the Non-Europeans in general than to specific sectional groups.





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